

Exploring Hawaiian Sovereignty: "U. S. Businessmen Oust Queen"

By Anthony Castanha

Writer's Note: The following article is a continuation of our series on Hawaiian Sovereignty. This is a reprint of an article written by Wayne K. Westlake for the Honolulu Star Bulletin in September 1981. With Jan. 17, 1993, marking the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, HPP is examining and providing its readers with some background on this issue. Our series has previously focused on ancient Hawaiian history, the legacy of Captain Cook, Kamehameha the Great and the American missionary influence in Hawaii.

On Saturday afternoon, January 14, 1893, as news of Queen Liliuokalani's plans to proclaim a new Hawaiian constitution spread, an angry meeting was held in the downtown law office of William O. Smith.

The Committee of Safety, consisting of 13 members of the Annexation Club, was formed immediately to plan a course of action.

After a lengthy discussion, a motion was presented by Lorrin A. Thurston. According to Lt. Lucien Young of the USS Boston, Thurston's motion "resolved that it is the sense of the committee that in view of the present unsatisfactory state of affairs, the proper course to pursue is to abolish the monarchy and apply for annexation to the United States."

A special subcommittee was then appointed to meet with U. S. Minister John L. Stevens "and to inform him of the situation and ascertain from him what, if any, protection or assistance could be afforded by the United States forces for the protection of life and property."

The subcommittee, led by Lorrin Thurston, went immediately to meet with Stevens and according to



Queen Lydia Liliuokalani (Bishop Museum photo)

William O. Smith (Thurston's law partner), Stevens told Thurston "that the United States troops on board the Boston would be ready to land any moment to prevent the destruction of American life and property, and in regard to the matter of establishing a provisional government, they of course would recognize the existing government whatever it might be."

At a special meeting at Thurston's house later that night, several committee members and others, including Sanford B. Dole, associate justice of the Hawaiian Supreme Court, worked late into the night drafting the documents essential for an overthrow. As Dole was to write later, what helped inspire their revolutionary plans was that "we knew that the United States minister was in sympathy with us."

Early the next morning, Sunday, January 15, 1893, Thurston met with Hawaii Cabinet ministers Colburn and Peterson, and informed them that "the Committee of Safety are not content to let matters rest as they are."

The queen has announced her intention of prom-

ulgating the constitution when the opportunity presents itself, and they do not propose to sit over a volcano and wait for her to explode it when she chooses. We feel that there is no safety so long as she remains on the throne."

Later that morning the Committee of Safety met for three hours at the home of W. R. Castle. The organization of a provisional government was discussed along with the decision to hold a mass public rally the following afternoon.

After the meeting, Thurston and W. O. Smith met again with U. S. Minister Stevens and filled him in on their plans to establish a provisional government. Stevens gave assurances of personal safety and his "earnest purpose to afford all the protection that was in his power."

On Monday morning, January 16, 1893, the Committee of Safety met for another three hours. Before noon, a letter to the American minister was drafted and signed, requesting the minister to land troops from the battleship USS Boston which was presently positioned in Honolulu Harbor.

"We, the undersigned, citizens and residents of Honolulu, respectfully represent that, in view of recent public events in this kingdom, culminating in the revolutionary acts of Queen Liliuokalani on Saturday last, the public safety is menaced and lives and property are in peril, and we appeal to you and the United States forces at your command for assistance. We are unable to protect ourselves without aid, and, therefore pray for the protection of the United States forces."

The letter was delivered to Stevens and that afternoon the mass rally was held, some 1,500 people attended, nearly all the "male white foreign element in the city." Speeches were fiery and emotions ran high. A resolution was adopted condemning the queen and denouncing her actions, and the Commit-

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tee of Safety was given the power to act as it saw fit.

Half an hour after the rally, the Committee of Safety met again in W. O. Smith's office downtown. Thurston and Smith went "at once to Mr. Stevens' house, the U. S. delegation, stated the case to him and he (Stevens) said that as a precautionary measure, and to protect American life and property, he had ordered the troops to be landed at 5 o'clock, and that they would come."

At 5 o'clock Lt. Cmdr. Swinburne landed his heavily armed 162-man force from four boats near Nuuanu Avenue. They marched up Fort Street to Merchant Street then down King Street past the palace, stopping across from Kawaiahao Church. Before dark, the troops moved further down King Street to the spacious J. B. Atherton Estate.

By 10 o'clock Stevens had secured accommodations and the Marines marched back to Arion Hall, a small building next to the government building and across from the palace.

According to Adm. J. S. Skerrett, Stevens' positioning of the armed forces "was inadvisable to locate the troops there; if they were landed for the protection of the U. S. citizens...if they landed to support provisional government troops...it was a wise choice."

At 8 o'clock that night, the Committee of Safety met at the home of Henry Waterhouse, next door to Minister Stevens. Sanford B. Dole was asked repeatedly to serve as president of the provisional but he still could not make up his mind to do so or not.

The next morning, Tuesday, January 17, 1893, the day of the overthrow, Dole met with friends, in-

cluding Thurston, seeking advice.

Then, according to Dole's own account: "At 10 o'clock I went downtown. I remembered a letter I had in my pocket which Thurston had given me that morning, addressed to Mr. Stevens, setting forth our intended movement, and proposing to ask his recognition. I went in and handed the letter to him. He did not say much but I remember that he said: 'I think you have a great opportunity.'"

Dole returned to W. O. Smith's office where another Committee of Safety meeting was in progress and announced his decision to serve as president.

Lorrin Thurston had been sick since the previous evening but on this momentous morning he drafted the proclamation to be used in deposing the queen. By afternoon, the committee members had all gathered, signed the proclamation and were ready to act.

The members of the Committee of Safety, led by Dole, then proceeded to the government building (guarded by U. S. troops across the street) and promptly took over without a struggle. The lengthy proclamation deposing Queen Liliuokalani, dissolving the monarchy, and establishing a provisional government was read on the front steps of the building.

The new government asked at once for recognition from the U. S. minister and before the queen and her armed forces had surrendered, a note from U. S. Minister Stevens to Dole announced that: "A Provisional Government having been duly constituted in the place of the recent government of Queen Liliuokalani and said Provisional Government being in full possession of the government building, the archives and the treasury and in control of the capital of the Hawaiian Islands, I hereby recognize

said Provisional Government as the de facto government of the Hawaiian Islands."

By now Provisional Government soldiers had begun to arrive and occupy the buildings and grounds. Martial Law was proclaimed and soon after, Queen Liliuokalani yielded her kingdom to the United States under protest.

The 10 weeks following the revolution of 1893 were felled with "disquieting rumors," according to Dole, involving threats against the new Provisional Government and Dole and his wife were afraid to sleep in their house.

Consequently, on January 31, 1893, the Provisional Government decided "to ask the American minister to afford us protection during the pending (annexation) negotiations."

They asked Stevens to raise the American flag "for the protection of the Hawaiian Islands for the time being" and Stevens didn't hesitate. The next day a 9 in the morning the American flag was raised over the government building and the Provisional Government's volunteer army was replaced by U. S. marines.

In a message sent that day, February 1, 1893, Stevens reported to Secretary of State John W. Foster that "Today at 9 a.m. in accordance with the request of the Provisional Government in Hawaii I have placed the government of Hawaii under United States protection."

And in a long dispatch sent to Foster that same day, Stevens made his most memorable statement: "The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe, and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it."

On February 14, 1893, Foster signed a treaty for

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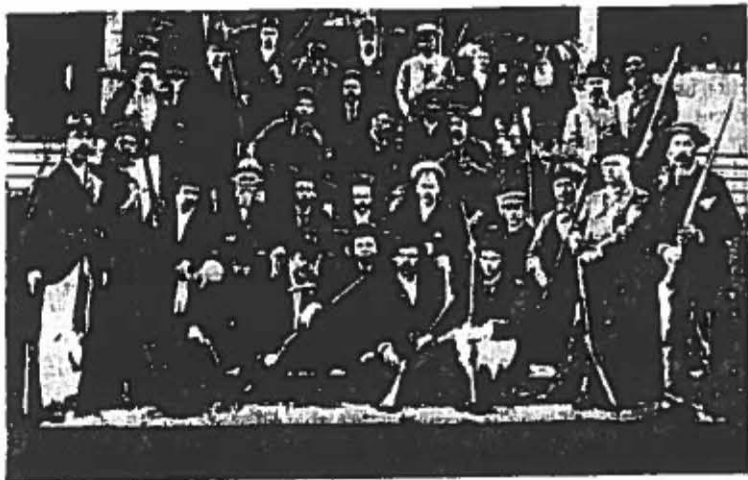


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Following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation in 1893, the "executive council" of President Sanford B. Dole's newly appointed "Provisional Government" occupy Iolani Palace. Seated from left are James King, interior minister; Dole; William Smith, attorney general; and Peter Jones, finance minister. (State Archives Photo)



Sixteen armed gangs of businessmen called the "Honolulu Rifles" were organized under the leadership of Sanford B. Dole's "Provisional Government" in 1893. On Feb. 1, 1893, they would be assisted by U. S. Marines who had, consequently assisted in the overthrow of the Hawaiian government 15 days earlier. Charles Montague Cook (second from the right) commanded this gang. (Bishop Museum Press)

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annexation with the Provisional Government of Hawaii commissioners, sent to Washington two days after the overthrow.

Three weeks later, on March 4, 1893, the Harrison administration was replaced by the Cleveland administration in Washington. The annexation treaty was quickly withdrawn from the Senate "for the purpose of re-examination."

Before any new action was to be taken, President Cleveland and Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham decided to send a special commissioner James H. Blount to Hawaii to examine the causes of

the role played by U. S. Minister Stevens.

When Commissioner Blount arrived on March 29, 1893, he discovered the American flag flying and American troops still stationed on shore. Blount immediately ordered Adm. Skerrett to lower the flag and to return the Marines to their ship.

Blount stayed in Hawaii for four months gathering his information. When completed, the Blount report ran 684 pages long and concluded in part that: "The leaders of the revolutionary movement would not have undertaken it but for Mr. Stevens' promise to protect them against any danger from the government."

After receiving Blount's report, Gresham waited three months before reporting to President Cleveland.

Gresham's report laid much of the blame for the revolution directly on U. S. Minister Stevens. advised the president not to resubmit the annexation treaty and asked: "Should not the great wrong done on a feeble but independent state by an abuse of the authority of the United States be undone by restoring the legitimate government?"

"Anything short of that will not, I respectfully submit, satisfy the demands of justice."

(To be continued)

One Man's Opinion

About The Right And The Need To Vote

By Carlton T. Saito

On Nov. 3, 1992, we will be able to exercise the most fundamental right of citizens in a democratic republic—the right to vote to choose our elected government officials. We will have the opportunity to select the next President of the United States—commonly considered the leader of the Free World. We will have the chance to choose who we will send to U. S. Congress and who will represent us on the county levels. Oahu voters will also get to decide yes or no on the Honolulu City Charter Amendments. These decisions will affect all of our lives for more than

just the next four years.

The Founding Fathers of the United States fought the Revolutionary War for the right to have a say in government. The Declaration of Independence states, "...Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed..." That means that the people must express their will in order for government to work. And the best and simplest way for people to express their will is through the ballot box.

Non-whites gained the right to vote after the Civil War through the passage of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870. The Women's Suffrage Movement won for women



the right to vote with the approval of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

The 24th Amendment, passed in 1964, prohibited any tax on voting, enabling the poor, as well as the rich, to vote. In 1971, the 26th Amendment extended the right to vote to citizens who are eighteen years of age or older.

Throughout U. S. history, Americans have struggled to secure and preserve for us the right to vote. We will

waste their efforts if we do not vote.

In 1988, 443,742 citizens registered to vote in Hawaii. That total rose to 453,389 for the 1990 general election. And 432,723 citizens registered for the primary election this year, but only 51 percent of registered voters actually voted on Sept. 19, 1992. For the general election on Nov. 3, 1992, 464,495 have registered to vote. But we must do more than just register. We must actually vote.

And we must vote wisely. We should not vote for candidates merely because we recognize their names. We need to evaluate the candidates on their qualifications, records in office and positions on issues and then vote for the best person for the job.

Anyone who does not vote should not complain about the government later. I hope that every registered voter will vote!

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